

Office Of Employment Readiness

OER Network News

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Winter Issue '09



From the Administrator...



In the last quarter of 2008, The Office of Employment Readiness (OER) created six (6) strategic planning objectives, and set measurable goals to create a seamless integration of our three divisions: MSI, Prison Build Program, and Prisoner Education. In this issue, we report on "Where We Are" in accomplishing our 6 strategic objectives. A new law has created a unique opportunity for OER to partner with a select group of private industries. In almost every state, Correctional Industries are attracting and partnering with local businesses to produce goods and provide valuable services at affordable prices. These joint ventures will ultimately add to the value of our mission, and complement the MPRI model to create safer neighborhoods & better citizens by preparing prisoners to re-enter society and the workplace. The following new Vision and Mission statements represent the OER Employment Program.

William D. Wilson Jr., OER Administrator

Office Of Employment Readiness

Vision Statement

"In order to enhance Michigan's workforce, the Office of Employment Readiness will provide prisoners of the Michigan Department of Corrections the opportunity to develop the skills necessary for sustainable employment upon return to the community."

Mission Statement

"The Office of Employment Readiness will provide prisoners of the Michigan Department of Corrections academic, career and technical education, and workplace skills training programs in order to acquire and maintain a job. The OER team will accomplish this mission within a continuous quality improvement environment to ensure the most effective and cost efficient programs."

BREAKTHROUGHS IN PRIVATE INDUSTRY PARTNERSHIPS



In October 2007, Michigan legislators passed a new law unique for MDOC and MSI. Senator Jason Allen of Traverse City, MI introduced Senate Bill No. 632. The senate bill opened the door to explore doing business with local for-profit enterprises. The Correctional Industries Act (P.A. 15 of 1968) section 6 was amended under a new act (P.A. 102 of 2007) section 6(1). Governor Jennifer M. Granholm signed the bill into law effective October 1, 2007. In short, P.A. 102 states: *“MSI may sell to any private business or individual, if the products are “cut and sewn textiles”, but only if the same or a comparable in style product is not manufactured by a private business in this state”*. MSI team members immediately began to research potential local partnerships. Four industries were targeted based on the prospects for success and the individuals behind the product. The joint ventures will create additional cut & sew trades for prisoners. Michigan based businesses will secure a variety of textile products for Michigan citizens from MSI without outsourcing to other countries. Two of the four partnerships are now fully operational and showing success. **Britten Banners** and **RealKidz** are highlighted in this issue. While production is in full swing for these two clients, product designs and prototypes are underway for an athletic wear company called Xumin and a patented evaluation gown for an Okemos, MI based medical company.

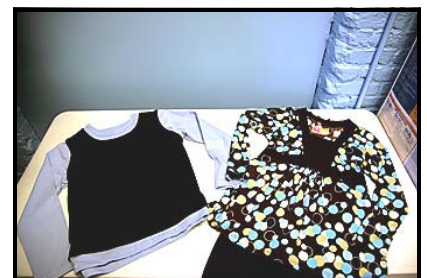
OER Provides “Cut-n-Sew” for RealKidz



Merrill Guerra, RealKidz CEO believes OER Program fits her company mission. At right: excited customers browse showroom.

Like many first-time entrepreneurs, Merrill Guerra, CEO and founder of RealKidz had an idea. She was unable to find trendy clothing designs for her plus-size daughter. After taking a poll among friends, she discovered that her problem wasn't unique. After conducting much research on her own, she found that over 5.5 million young girls need plus-size clothing, a potential market worth \$3.2 billion. Initial start up costs along with finding investors was tough, but Guerra took the

plunge and opened a showroom in Ypsilanti, MI. RealKidz makes and sells clothing for plus-size girls ages 5-12. The dream was now a reality, but Guerra learned right away the pitfalls of outsourcing design and production work. She hoped to find a production resource close to home. A door opened with the opportunity to partner with MSI under the new Correctional Industries act (P.A. 102 of 2007). MSI garment factories are gearing up to provide cut and sew production for RealKidz.



(Continued on page 3.)

OER Provides “Cut-n-Sew” for RealKidz



Merrill Guerra looks forward to producing the next line of clothing for RealKidz.

The entire line of RealKidz clothing will be manufactured at various MSI garment factories throughout the state.

“The concept Guerra has is wonderful,” said MSI Area Manager Joyce Cram, who has played an integral part in implementing cut & sew opportunities. “It puts a lot of color in our factory,” said Cram. The expansion of MSI garment manufacturing inside the Huron Valley Women’s Correctional Facility will provide easier communication with RealKidz which is headquartered in Ypsilanti, MI.

Prisoners will have the opportunity to gain a valuable skill while learning not only to design, cut and sew, but also to show up for work every day, take instruction, work as a

team and get along with colleagues. “With other cut-and-sew manufacturers, they hear about our mission and they think it’s pretty cool, but the OER team really “get” the vision and they get excited about it,” Guerra said. RealKidz has plans to expand into slim and average sizes by fall 2009 and eventually into a line of custom-fit clothing for boys.



Guerra at RealKidz Headquarters



Models show RealKidz Clothing



Used Banners Create New Fashion Accessories

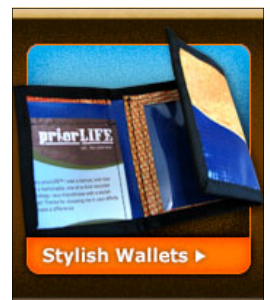


Do you wonder what happens to event banners after the event?



Unique bags made from recycled event banners are gaining in popularity.

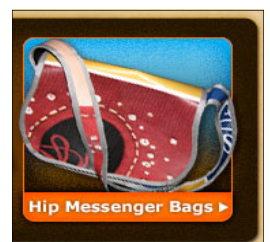
MSI has teamed up with Traverse City based Britten Banner, Inc. to put a green spin on the phrase “out with the old, in with the new.” Britten produces banners and signage for major sporting events, corporations, trade shows and more worldwide. Company managers observed that most of those banners become dated and unusable for future events. Instead of shipping the used banners off to the landfill or storing them in a warehouse, a better idea was hatched-priorLIFE. A new subsidiary of Britten called priorLIFE, is now transforming used banners into fashionable tote bags, messenger bags, wine bags and wallets. In addition, if recycling banners into bags wasn’t ingenious enough, here’s the added twist: each bag comes with a customized tag that tells the story of its “prior life.” No two products are the same, and they are made entirely of recycled material. Banners will be cut to pattern, lined and stitched by prisoners at MSI garment factories throughout the state. Visit www.priorlife.com to learn more.



Stylish Wallets ▶



Custom Totes ▶



Hip Messenger Bags ▶

OER WORKKEYS PILOT

The Michigan Department of Corrections (MDOC) Education Section has recently expanded its delivery of national ACT WorkKeys assessments to include a collaboration with Michigan State Industries (MSI) prisoner workers. ACT's WorkKeys are national, standardized tests used to measure workforce readiness. A National Career Readiness Certificate, based upon WorkKeys Scores, is a portable credential that verifies to employers anywhere in the United States that a person has essential core employability skills. Persons receiving WorkKeys scores and certificates can use them upon release to look for employment at Michigan Works! and online at ACT's WorkKeys national job databank.

MDOC Education and MSI have combined resources to deliver WorkKeys testing as a pilot at MSI's Laundry factories. Under the leadership of Education staff, data has been compiled and staff is in the process of comparing skill levels in MSI factories to similar positions in the labor market. Out of 128 prisoners that were assessed, 111 scored high enough to be issued one of the three National Career Readiness Certificates.

Prisoner laundry worker job descriptions are being standardized throughout the laundry factories and WorkKeys scores are included in the updated job descriptions. ACT WorkKeys has created baseline scores for various entry-level positions in the labor market. By using the baselines, this will assist MSI staff in identifying qualified prisoner workers that may have taken the WorkKeys assessments. Qualified candidates benefit MSI because it reduces training time, thus improving the effectiveness of dollars and staff time spent on training. WorkKeys also benefits the prisoners because it builds confidence that their skills meet the needs of employers inside and outside of prison. It may also improve prisoners' opportunities for career changes and advancement while employed at MSI, as well as with employers upon release.

*"These courses have helped me to believe in myself. I have learned to work with other people. I have a new perspective towards life."
"I am learning to face my fears of entering into a positive workforce upon release."
"These programs provide better skills for better jobs after release."*



"My horticulture training from MDOC was instrumental in my success today. My skills as a horticulturalist helped my employer look beyond my past and gave me a chance to prove my abilities. I am now managing seven greenhouses for Elk Lake Floral."



"Technical education programs provide the means for an offender to exercise legitimate income options instead of everything back to "old" illegal ways of making money. A jobless offender is more likely to re-offend than one with a promising career."





OER STRATEGIC PLANNING UPDATE

As you recall from our last newsletter, six strategic objectives were ratified by MSI superintendents, assistant superintendents, engineers, supervisors and union staff that met in Lansing for a two-day leadership workshop. Each of the six (6) Strategic Planning committees have been meeting to fulfill their charter agreements. The overall report to-date is as follows:

1. Maintain Self-Sufficiency:

- Sales and Marketing:
REPORT: New sales and marketing plan in place.
- New Products & Production Design:
REPORT: Evaluation of current product base is underway. New textile products have expanded with the enactment of P.A. 102 of 2007 permitting sales of cut and sew items to the general public. Stories were highlighted in this edition of OER Network News.
- Correctional Act and the Prisoner Industry Enhancement Certification Program (PIECP):
REPORT: Application drafts are being written and meetings held with state personnel.



Larry Collar, center, with the Office of Great Workplace Development was awarded for his expertise in facilitating the Strategic Planning Workshop.

2. Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI):

REPORT: Committee will work with staff and consultants from MDOC/MSI Supply Chain Management Initiative currently underway statewide.

3. Create External and Internal Public Relations Campaign:

REPORT: Discussions have begun with private sector public relations firms. OER Network newsletter is now, for the first time, sent to MDOC personnel statewide.

4. Develop an Alternative/Renewable Energy Business:

REPORT: Meetings are ongoing with nonprofit and for-profit companies and the Governor's office looking at new opportunities.

5. Staff Training and Career Development:

REPORT: Review of current leadership opportunities and potential new courses designed to align with strategic planning initiatives are taking place within MSI.

6. Prisoner Training and Skill Development:

REPORT: Committee work is ongoing and far reaching. WorkKeys initiative is playing an important role in the integration of inmates to MSI. Story highlighted on page 4.

PRISON BUILD PROGRAM A SUCCESS STORY

The 2008 Habitat for Humanity build season was a success given the state of the economy. Hundreds of items were built and sent statewide including wall panels, cabinets, horticulture orders, and sheds. New housing designs have been drafted and will be uploaded on the Prison Build website this spring. Habitat for Humanity of Michigan and the Prison Build Program are exploring a new venture to build items for Habitat ReStores throughout the state. ReStores sell donated items in order to raise money for Habitat housing throughout the state.

The last of 16 cabins will be built by Prison Build inmates at the Saginaw Correctional Facility and delivered to state parks this year. The construction of these cabins were specifically assigned to the Prison Build Program as a result of a grant for the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund. Jack Adam, building supervisor at Saginaw Correctional Facility, led inmates to build the first prototype that now sits on the Lake Huron shoreline at the Port Crescent State Park in Port Austin. The success of that build made a possible \$360,000 grant to build 16 more. The interior of each cabin has been built with wood milled from the ash trees removed as a result of the ash borer disease. This unique recycling effort saved money and put to use many of those trees that had to be destroyed.



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